

Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thought and Policies

*An African-Centered Paradigm for the
Second Phase of the African Revolution*



Kwame Botwe-Asamoah

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Kwame Botwe-A samoah

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This book is dedicated to two great mothers whose wisdom and guidance changed the lives of their children. First, to Nkrumah's mother, Nyaniba, who dragged Nkrumah several times to school until he gave in to her demand. Finally, to my loving mother, Akua Awusiana, who also dragged me to school on two occasions. She died four months after I had left her in Ghana for the US in December 1993. I was all that she had in this world. Her living spirits, since her untimely death and that of my father, Ohene Kwaku Owusu Botwe, have been the driving force throughout the research and the writing of this book.

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Preface

Growing up in both Gold Coast, later Ghana, I witnessed much systematic campaign against Kwame Nkrumah's political, social and cultural thought and policies. In my elementary schools, some of my teachers openly condemned his alleged communist ideology in the classrooms. One particular teacher told us that with communism, we were "all going to wear khaki uniforms and line up everyday for rationed food with our parents."

The Odekro (owner of town) of my town Ettokrom in Dr. J.B. Danquah's (a founding member of the United Gold Coast Convention and a leading opponent of Nkrumah) constituency said that Nkrumah was an atheist; in addition, he denounced him for siding with Nasser in Egypt's war with Israel in 1956, whom he described as "the chosen children of God." In the intellectual community, Nkrumah was also accused of lowering the educational standards because of his policy on Africanization of the curriculum of the educational system in the country; this included his decree abolishing a pass in the English language as the sole criteria for obtaining the secondary school certificate. An added frequent accusation was an alleged toffee (candies) that Nkrumah frequently dropped from the ceiling into the hands of the Young Pioneers, which the Christian God could not do, when asked. Between 1955 and February 1966, his foes, both within and without Ghana engaged in vicious lies about him as well as a well-organized assassination attempts on his life.

In fact, no political leader or ruler in Ghana, to date, has experienced terrorist attacks in terms of constant bomb throwing, a face-to-face gun shot and ambushes as Nkrumah did. Furthermore, the kind of economic sabotage and political destabilization campaign against his government at the national and international levels is unparalleled in Ghana's political history. Yet, in spite of the hostile and violent environment in Ghana, the national unity as well as the rapid cultural, social, economic transformation and industrial development achieved for the country within the short span by Nkrumah's government will go down in African history as one of the most remarkable periods of post-independence achievements.

These positive acclamations notwithstanding, I saw the heroic struggle of Nkrumah and his adoration by the ordinary people, including the majority of the inhabitants of my village and neighboring towns and urban centers. He was viewed as a god-sent savior. While many Ghanaians praised and adored him as a great visionary leader, others continued to see him as Africa's inimitable leader.

Historically speaking, no African political leader, past or present, has more completely personified the political, economic and cultural liberation and unity of Africa than did Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. As the father of African nationalism, he advanced the cause of African liberation and engendered an understanding of the insidious nature of neo-colonialism. He stands forth as one of the few pivotal political leaders of the twentieth century. The formation of the African Union in South Africa in the summer of 2001, though a shift from Nkrumah's African-centered union government, to promote rapid economic

development of the continent is an attestation to the foresight and vision of Nkrumah's policy on Pan-Africanism.

Nkrumah's unparalleled accomplishments regarding African liberation as well as his incomparable leadership skills and achievements in terms of national unity, social, educational, economic transformation and industrial projects in Ghana came to be buried by the kind of systematic misinformation warfare following the CIA orchestrated military coup that overthrew his government on February 24, 1966 (Stockwell 1978:160 and 201). It is this politically orchestrated misinformation which has come to serve as a model for discourse on Nkrumah's political and cultural philosophy and policies by his foes and some of his admirers.

Studies on the nature of the political and cultural institutions of the Nkrumah era have been carried out without adequate reference to colonial legacies. Even when such a connection is made it has often ignored the contradiction between the thinking patterns of the European trained African scholars, and political and cultural activists in charge of the institutions one hand, and Nkrumah's African-centered vision, on the other. Also, the major error by Nkrumah's critics is their failure to acknowledge the fact that he was the only African leader at the time to formulate an African-centered socio-philosophical system as a guiding principle for post-independence Ghana and Africa's socio-economic transformation.

Nkrumah inherited a fragmented country besieged by an insidious colonial legacy, such as Eurocentric economic, judicial and educational systems, law enforcement and military institutions, civil service administrative superstructure, infectious diseases and uneven socio-economic development. Other aspects of the colonial legacy included illiteracy, ignorance, superstitions and undemocratic and violent behaviors of the embittered parochial and ethnic based political parties. All these were more difficult to combat than the anti-colonial struggle. Thus, the tendency of such critics to compare and contrast, *inter alia*, the ideas of African revolutionaries like Cabral and Fanon with Nkrumah's ideas at the anti-colonial stage and the post-independence politico-cultural philosophy and policies are thus inappropriate. Also, any discourse that lumps together the ontological nature of both the anti-colonial struggle and that of the post-independence socio-political and cultural revolution, especially in the context of the cold war politics, with respect to Nkrumah's Ghana, would be an intellectual aberration.

Another common error among scholars of post-independence socio-economic and cultural transformation in Nkrumah's Ghana has been the tendency to present them in a linear fashion. Rooted in Eurocentric perspective, this linear approach has tended to reduce Nkrumah's integrated educational, economic, cultural and Pan-African agenda into separate entities for abstract analysis. As a consequence, culture has come to be seen as an entity by itself having no place in African political, economic and social transformation. Theater, they say, should not be mixed with political ideology (Agovi, 1989:8). Not only is such a perspective an antithesis to African aesthetics, but it has also led to several false assumptions on the role of theater in socio-economic transformation in Ghana. In the final analysis, some politicians, and intellectuals in Ghana refer to Nkrumah's politico-cultural and economic theories and policies as outdated and of no use for the current dilemmas. Yet, while this same populace complain bitterly about the abrogation of Nkrumah's socio-economic and education services resulting from his

rational thinking, they ironically cry for a Eurocentric political system and Adam Smith's *laissez-fair* economic theories and policies formulated in 1776.

This book synthesizes and analyzes the relationship between Kwame Nkrumah's politico-cultural philosophy and policies as an Afrocentric paradigm for the second phase of the African revolution. It also argues for the relevance of his theories and policies in today's Africa. The book examines and analyses three aspects of Nkrumah's politico-cultural thought from a holistic standpoint. First, his socio-political philosophy returns to traditional African ethics, humanistic values and an egalitarian mode of production to formulate a new socio-economic system for post-independence Africa. Second, the institutional aspect of his cultural thought offered an African-centered framework for institutional development. Third, his thought on creative culture also provided for an African-centered perspective to undergird the intellectual and artistic endeavors of the School of Music and Drama, with specific reference to the National Theater Movement. This integrative cultural thought thus offered an African-centered prototype for the statutory cultural institutions in the society and in the academy. It is this holistic framework of Nkrumah's Pan-African politico-cultural agenda that is often ignored by several scholars and his critics.

In writing this book, I have attempted to analyze Kwame Nkrumah's politico-cultural philosophy and policies. In doing so, I realize my limitations as regards the data upon which the book is written. The research was based on qualitative, ethnographic and Afrocentric research methods. As the Afrocentric research scholar Kershaw (1989:47) puts it, "the unity between theory and praxis is possible only if praxis occurs before construction." Accordingly, the theory was developed during the data collection process or grounded in the data.

The data collection consists of primary and secondary materials as well as interviews. The primary materials included Kwame Nkrumah's major speeches and works, his government's policy statements, parliamentary instruments, committees' reports, documents on the Arts Council of Ghana, the Institute of African Studies and this researcher's personal experience as a student in the School at the time. The cognate secondary materials consisted of studies done by scholars on Nkrumah's political thought, his cultural policies, and the educational and artistic institutions of the era.

I interviewed renowned and well-informed Ghanaian scholars and cultural activists. They include those who were responsible for the implementation of Kwame Nkrumah's politico-cultural policies, and those who have headed theater institutions in Ghana. It provided me the opportunity of stepping into the minds of those persons who saw, participated in and/or experienced what is popularly described as the era of Ghana's cultural revolution. Critical among them were Professor Emeritus J.H.Nketia, Honorable Kojo Botsio and His Excellency Ambassador Kofi Awoonor. In addition, I interviewed two military officers who were members of the President Own Guard Regiment at the time of the military coup on February 24, 1966, and who have first hand information about Nkrumah's military support to the liberation fighters in Africa. Retired Colonel David Gbon Zanleringu, was the commander of the President Own Guard Regiment, and handled some aspects of the training of the African freedom fighters in Ghana. Retired Colonel Kwasi Oteng, a Second Lieutenant at the time, was the most senior officer on duty at the time of the coup, whose forces fought the invading forces till the arrival of his commanding officer, Colonel Zanleringu.

The advantage I had in the research is my familiarity with the political history, Nkrumah's political philosophy, language, and the cultural movement of the time. Also, I was one of the pioneering students at the School of Music and Drama, the performing arts wing of the Institute of African Studies. Prior to my admission into the School of Music and Drama in 1965, I was a Young Pioneer voluntary organizer responsible for the performing arts wing of the movement in Koforidua. Additionally, I was a member of the Eastern Regional Arts Council's Drama Club of Koforidua.

Many discourses on Kwame Nkrumah may continue to turn up, but without any depth in "African centered method," as he implored, such disquisition would be unavailing. This book thus provides an Afrocentric framework for further discourses on Kwame Nkrumah's socio-economic policies, his educational philosophy and policies, and his vision of a Pan-African socialist union government, embracing the Diasporan Africans.

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Me de Onyame ne nanamon da mo ase pii.

List of Abbreviations

ARPS	A borigines Rights Protection Society
CE	C ommon Era
CIA	C entral Intelligence Agency
CPP	C onvention People's Party
CYO	C ommittee for Y outh Organization
GCP	G hana C ongress Party
MAP	M oslem Association Party
NCBWA	N ational C ongress of B ritish West A frica
NLM	N ational Liberation Movement
NPP	N orthern People's Party
POGR	P resident Own Guard Regiment
OAU	O rganization of A frican U nity
UGCC	U nited Gold Coast C onvention
UN	U nited Nations
WANS	W est A frican National Secretariat

Chapter One

Introduction: The Raison d' Etre of Kwame Nkrumah's Politico-Cultural Thought

White domination a God-given right?
No, says Kwame Nkrumah.
Wrong to treat black men right?
Nonsense, exclaims Nkrumah.
And right to black men wrong?
No, shouts Kwame Nkrumah.
Enslaving, exploiting, oppressing,
Dehumanizing Africans—
Say all this our accursed lot?
Never! Vowed Kwame Nkrumah
Things wrong must be put right.

(Timothy, 43:1963)

Kwame Nkrumah was born on September 22, 1909 at Nkroful in the Western region of Ghana. On the eighth day of his birth, his father named him after a relative, Kofi Nwia. His parents were poor and illiterate. Though his father was a goldsmith, he was respected for his wise counsel by those who sought his advice about traditional issues and domestic affairs. Nkrumah's mother on the other hand was a petty trader. It was during his father's departure to Half-Assini, a seaport, for greener pastures that Nkrumah was born. His birth brought good fortune to both his parents. His father's commerce flourished while his mother's business became "bewildered at the amazing way in which she encountered success after success" (Ibid: 19).

Nkrumah, Timothy further indicates, accompanied his father, Kofi Ngolomah whenever he went on trek as he (Nkrumah) displayed great powers of observation. Consequently, his parents decided to supplement the monetary gifts presented to them at Nkrumah's birth "with the proceeds from their work with a view" of sending him to school (Ibid: 20). In 1915, his parents sent him to Roman Catholic Elementary School at Half-Assini. It was here that Nkrumah led his first "positive action" campaign to embarrass his class teacher as he urged his classmates to stay home during the visit of the Inspector of Schools (Ibid: 20). As Nkrumah (1957:11) explains, "we were not fond of the teacher because of his frequent use of the stick (to flog them), often we thought without just cause."

However, in the tradition of the Asona royal family, Nkrumah had to learn from his parents and the Elders of Nzima, from childhood, the history, traditions and customs of his people. In his *Black Star*, Davidson (1973:19) describes Nkrumah's early life as "a shy child who preferred to stand and listen to his elders rather than merely run with the crowd." As he brought himself "close to the customs of his people, he sucked in

knowledge of the challenges of life, and dreamed dreams about the power a man can have to meet and overcome them. It was a habit of mind that stayed with him" (Ibid: 19).

Though both his parents decided that he should go to school, the early source of influence on his view of life perhaps came from his mother. She dragged him there several times when he found his first day of school "so disappointing" (Nkrumah, 1957:6). Nkrumah describes his mother "as a most worthy and vigilant protector, her quite decisive moments... gave her a natural leadership" (Ibid: 5). When he complained to her one day for not giving him brothers and sisters as the only child of his mother, she pointed to the trees and said: "you see the big trees? They stand alone!" (Forward Ever, 1977:2).

His favorite delight during school break was gathering his class-mates under a shady tree for casual discussions. After Sunday school, Nkrumah would take a long walk with his friends to the beach under coconut trees and engage in a coconut feast while discussing current affairs. His special qualities at the Roman Catholic Elementary School attracted the attention of the Headmaster of the school, Reverend Father George Fisher. Hence, after completing the Standard VII examination (Middle School Leaving Certificate examination), he was made a pupil teacher at his alma mater. He was so small that he had to stand on a table to teach. While teaching at Axim, Nkrumah embarked on a substantial research into Nzima history. He was elected Secretary of the African Club, a literary and social organization; thereafter, he was elected the first General Secretary of Nzima Literature and Cultural Association.

After Nkrumah's one year of teaching Father Fisher sent him and his colleagues, Dominic C.Cobina and J.Edward to the Government Teacher Training College at Achimota in Accra. Due to his "unmanageable" behavior at Achimota, he was punished by the prefects and monitors. Yet, he paid great attention to his studies and participated in extra-curricular activities, such as concerts and sports. More importantly, "he delivered lectures and made persuasive speeches" (Timothy: 21).

It was while he was a student at Achimota Training College that Dr. Kwagyir Aggrey first aroused Nkrumah's cultural nationalism. Aggrey lectured the students about the great achievements of the African people long before the arrival of the Europeans. He constantly advised the young African students to study hard so that they could help liberate Africa from colonial rule. Nkrumah later decided to further his education in the United States, in order to devote the rest of his life toward the liberation of Africa from European colonialism. It was also Aggrey who introduced Nkrumah to the ideas and ideals of W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey (Taylor, 1990:87).

But it was "the coming of Azikiwe," which became an "electric shock to the younger ranks of intellectuals, like Nkrumah" (Davidson, 1973:24). Nkrumah had left Amisano in December 1934 for a visit to Accra, where he met Azikiwe, who was then Editor of the *African Morning Post*; also, he met Wallace Johnson the Editor of the *African Sentinel* and founder of the Youth League. Azikiwe's lectures, speeches, and articles fired his imagination for the emancipation of the African from thralldom. Through private talks, Azikiwe urged Nkrumah to go to his alma mater, Lincoln University in the United States and "to come back with the Golden Fleece" (Ibid: 24). This led him to recapture Dr. Aggrey's prophesy and inspirational lectures to go to the land, which had produced such Pan-African pioneers like Aggrey, Marcus Garvey and Du Bois.

Consequently, Nkrumah went ahead to pursue further education at Lincoln University, where he obtained two Bachelors degrees in Theology as well as in Economics and Sociology. Additionally, he earned a Master of Science degree in Education and a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. While finalizing his doctoral degree in philosophy, Nkrumah abruptly left for England in 1945 to study Law at Gray's Inn as well as pursue a doctoral degree in Political Science at the London School of Economics (Nkrumah, 1957:51). It is common knowledge that with a few chapters completed, Nkrumah had a disagreement with his advisor on the content of his dissertation on ethnophilosophy; rather than write and publish material with which Nkrumah disagreed, he left the doctoral program. He had originally proposed "The Philosophy of Imperialism, with Special Reference to Africa," as the topic for his thesis, which his advisor Dr. Morrow at the University of Pennsylvania rejected (Sherwood, 1996:63).

While a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, Nkrumah became instrumental in the establishment of an Institute of African Languages and Culture through his organizing skills. He sacrificed his academic work to build the institute on solid foundations. He also started translating "his dream of organizing all Africans in the United States" with the hope that they might one day return home to serve Africa. His dedication and intensive work led to "the first General Conference of Africans in America" held in September 1943 (Timothy: 32).

It was also while a student in the United States that Nkrumah started putting his thoughts on paper regarding the ruthless nature of colonialism on the African continent. By 1943, he had become immersed with politics delivering open-air lectures regarding the suffering of African people and the ultimate overthrow and extinction of colonialism and imperialism. What is more, Nkrumah started to envisage "a West African Federation, and, together with Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria and Durosimi Johnson of Sierra Leone, they planned on returning home" to step up strong agitation against colonial rule in the region (Ibid: 32-33). Nkrumah's boss at Sunship Building Dry Dock Company in Chester, Pennsylvania also confirms this when described him:

Kwame Nkrumah was the only African there. He was popular and well respected and had discussions with his colleagues about Africa. He had a vision of returning to the Gold Coast and in spite of the persuasion of friends, he insisted on returning to Africa. (Ibid: 26).

In Pennsylvania and adjoining states, Nkrumah forfeited social life and made it his [first] duty "to return to Africa and join in the struggle for its liberation from the tentacles of imperialism" (Ibid: 27). His popularity and commitment to return to Africa earned the admiration of his classmates at Lincoln so much that they voted him the "Most Interesting." They composed a little ditty in his honor for the class year book:

'Africa is the beloved of Nkrumah's dreams;
Philosopher, thinker with forceful schemes.
In aesthetics, politics, he's in the field;
Nkrumah's, "tres interessant," radiates appeal.' (Ibid: 27)

Thus Nkrumah's determination to fight against colonialism and imperialism in Africa became obvious to his classmates, professors and friends in the U.S.

Kwame Nkrumah's thoughts on colonialism lay the foundation of his political and cultural philosophy. He found colonialism crude and overt in terms of economic exploitation. Besides, it was also insidious as it dehumanized the cultural personality of the African. As noted by several writers (Agovi, 1990; Davidson, 1969; Ngugi, 1986; Okot p'Bitek, 1966; Rodney, 1981; Nkrumah, 1963), African culture and world view: epistemology, cosmology, aesthetics and axiology were severely attacked by the European Christian missionaries, tourist and anthropologists, during colonialism. The nature of education and the body of literature produced during colonialism invented "the so-called inferior traits" of the African (Diop, 1974:25). The self-proclaimed civilizing mission by European colonialists and the missionaries was depicted as a "duty of humanity" to raise the African to the level of "other men." It was this dehumanization campaign which, Diop (Ibid: 25) points out, "finally deeply affected" the cultural personality of the African. Thus, through psychosocial, coercive and brutal methods, the Europeans effectively dislocated the African from his cultural center and "placed him on the margins of their cultural context" (Asante, 1993:54).

Because culture carries rules for thinking, the European, during colonialism, introduced a type of educational system that transported total European cultural nationalism to their colonies in Africa. What they introduced, Rodney (1982:240) points out, was a new set of formal education which partly supplemented and partly replaced those which were in existence before the advent of colonialism. In the process, this system instilled a sense of affinity towards all things European. It was also a type that trained the African to assist the colonial administrators at the lowest rank and to staff privately owned European companies (Ibid: 240).

In effect, the educational system was characterized by absurdities in the transportation of Eurocentric education into Africa. In the British colonies like the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Nigeria, the school system trained the students to be inferior copies and caricatures of the English man. Being dislocated, the African students became "neither fish nor fowl, as they were denied" information about "their African past and told they had no present" (Ibid: 205). In the schools that I attended, we were given instructions in plant life which I could not understand, even though my father was a well known-herbalist in our region. We were taught that Mungo Park "discovered" River Niger, while David Livingston "discovered" Lake "Victoria," when in fact Africans led these two European tourists to the waters. The most absurd thing was the description of Africa as the "dark continent," which we had to learn. Our history lessons were about Europe and the white man's activities in Africa. We were made to believe that we had no culture and history to be proud of, and that our people had made no contribution towards human civilization.

From the onset, the educational system accorded high priority to Christian instructions. Operated by the Euro-Christian missionaries hunting for African converts, as Ani (1993:161) explains, the African heads were filled with devotional hymns, their psyches infused with submissive Christian attitudes. The missionary schools inculcated in the students Christian theology, cosmology, and western individualistic ethos, thereby dislocating their African identity, destroying their commitment to African collective or

communalistic ethos and erasing “their sense of patriotic responsibility to Africa” (Ibid: 161).

Church services or attendance was compulsory in the school system. In the schools that I attended and taught, Wednesday mornings were set aside for church service, in addition to daily morning devotion (particularly the Presbyterian Church) and Sunday church services. The Bible was used to urge the African to turn his cheek in the face of brutality and exploitation. It also drove home the message that everything would be good for the brutalized and exploited African in “heaven.” The African was associated with the biblical Ham, and the snake that tempted Eve. Both were used as favorite themes in some of the churches that I attended. Accordingly, accepting Christ as the Savior was to save the African from the alleged curses on the descendants of Ham (King, Jr., 1967:72–73).

The Christian God, Jesus, the saints, and all the apostles were presented as whites with blue eyes in the churches. African cosmology, religion, spirituality, medicine, music, dances and plastic arts were equated with the workings of the devil. Consequently, the African converts had to make confessions for observing these to Christian priests in order to be forgiven. Based on personal experience, students were punished by flogging for having participated in or watched any of the alleged instruments of the devil.

The creed of the Christian church in some parts of Africa was one of violent proselytization. Ani (1993:161) discloses that the missionaries burned down the Bwiti chapels in Gabon, “where this syncretistic religious movement was seen as a possible nurturing ground for African nationalism. By this violent behavior, the role of the church as an aggressor in the military and imperialistic pursuit during colonialism is made transparent. As Ani (Ibid: 161) further points out, the church’s “civilizing mission” was therefore a pretext.

The Christian missionaries as partners in the colonial enterprise were also made manifest in their preaching of “the gospel of heaven and hell” (Ogun and Irele (1978:17), whereby sin and evil were equated with the African culture and personality. To enter heaven thus meant that the African converts had to abandon their entire cultural heritage and inadvertently adopt European cultural nationalism. The Christian ideology was thus an “ideally fashioned weapon for the destruction of the self-image and value system of the African” (Ani: 162). In their proselytization, the missionaries convinced themselves that those they sought to convert had no religion. In setting new value systems in the colonies, the church stressed humility, docility and acceptance of whatever misfortune fell on the African.

As such, European cultural imperialism and Christian ideology were inseparable. The assumption of the missionaries was that if the African had to be a docile and loyal servant, his allegiance to Africa had to be broken. Total admiration for everything European had to be instilled in him, in addition to his unquestionable obedience to the white man. Thus, through the Christian missionaries’ proselytization, the African neophytes, at the time of independence, had been reduced to objects acted upon by the European colonizers.

Under the guise of their so-called “civilizing mission,” the European colonists and missionaries invented doctrines of African inferiority to rationalize colonialism and the holocaust of the enslavement, and to guide all European activities in Africa. These racist doctrines and colonial assimilationist policies resulted in “cultural isolation of the African past while they encouraged a deliberate sense of repudiation of the developed African